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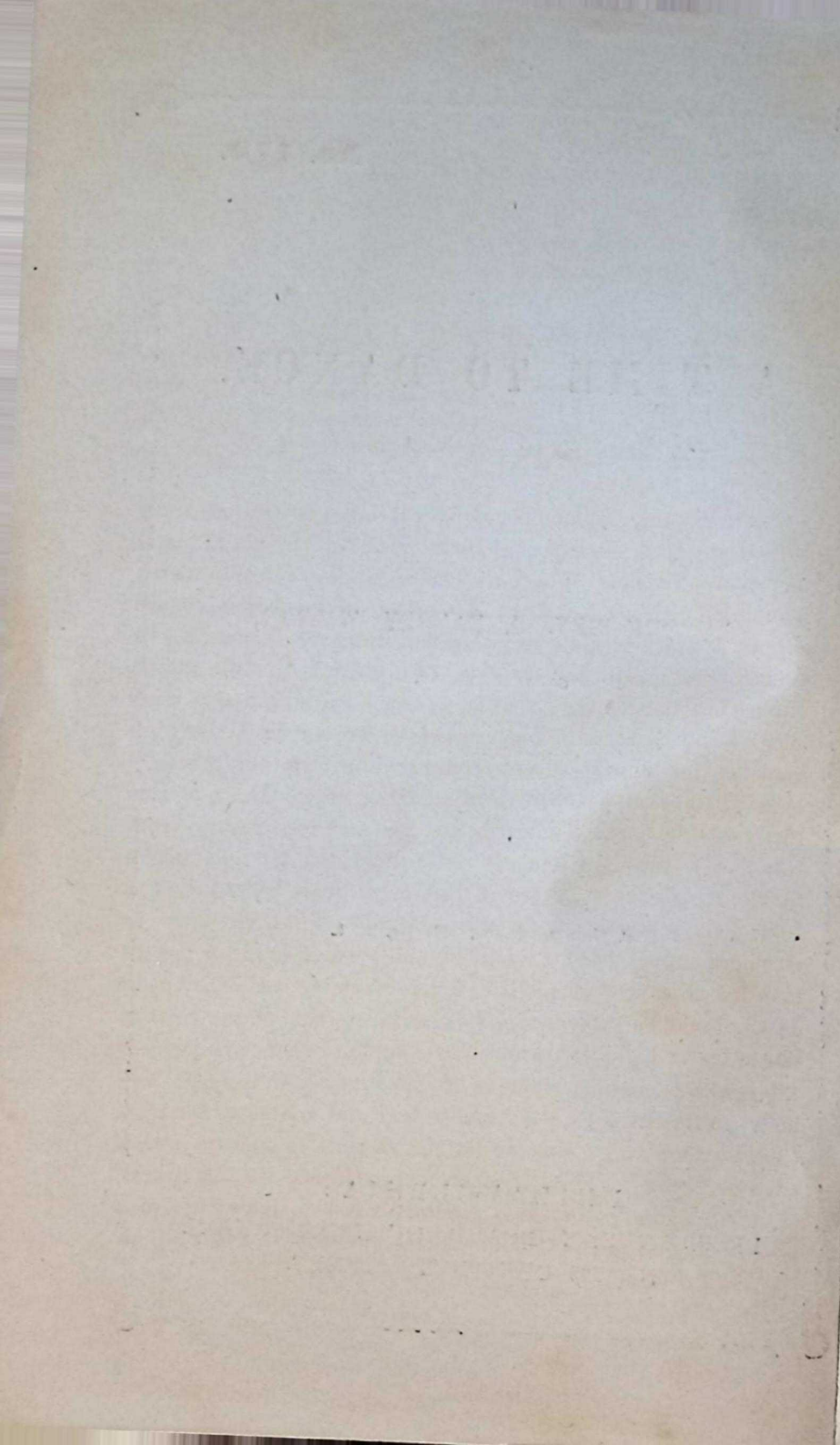
A TIME TO DANCE.

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OF CINCINNATI.

A time to dance. Eccles. iii. 4.

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A TIME TO DANCE.

A BALL having occurred in the parish of a worthy minister, at a season of peculiar seriousness among the youth of his pastoral charge, and many of them, from conscientious motives, having declined to attend, their absence was attributed, erroneously, to the influence and interference of their pastor, who, in consequence, received the following anonymous note:

"SIR—Obey the voice of holy Scripture. Take the following for your text, and contradict it. Show in what consists the evil of that innocent amusement of dancing. Eccles. 3:4: 'A time to weep, and a time to laugh: a time to mourn, and a time to dance.'

"A TRUE CHRISTIAN, BUT NO HYPOCRITE."

The minister immediately wrote the following reply, which, as the note was anonymous and without address, remained in his own possession for some time, when he communicated it to the public, thinking it might meet the eye and correct the opinions of the writer of the note and others:

MY DEAR SIR—Your request that I would preach from Eccles. 3:4, I cannot comply with at present, since there are some Christian duties more important than dancing, which a part of my people seem disposed to neglect. Whenever I perceive, however, that the duty of dancing is too much neglected, I shall not fail to raise a warning voice against so dangerous an omission. In the mean time there are certain difficulties in the text which you commend to my notice, the solution of which I should receive with gratitude from "a true Christian."

My first difficulty respects the *time* for dancing; for, although the text declares that there is a time to dance, yet when that time is, it does not determine. Now this point I wish to ascertain exactly, before I preach upon the subject; for it would be as criminal, I conclude, to dance at the wrong time, as to neglect to dance at the right time. I

have been able to satisfy myself, in some particulars, when it is *not* "a time to dance." We shall agree, I presume, that on the Sabbath-day, or at a funeral, or during the prevalence of a pestilence, or the rocking of an earthquake, or the roaring of a thunder-storm, it would be no time to dance. If we were condemned to die, and were waiting in prison the day of execution, this would be no time for dancing; and if our feet stood on a slippery place beside a precipice, we should not dare to dance.

But suppose the very day to be ascertained; is the whole day, or only a part, to be devoted to this amusement? And if a part of the day only, then which part is "the time to dance?" From the notoriously pernicious effects of "*night meetings*," in all ages, both upon morals and health, no one will pretend that the *evening* is the "time to dance;" and perhaps it may not be immaterial which portion of the daylight is devoted to that innocent amusement. But allowing the *time* to be ascertained, there is still an obscurity in the text. Is it a *command* to dance, or only a *permission*? Or is it merely a declaration of the fact, that, as men are constituted, there is a time when all the events alluded to in the text do, in the providence of God, come to pass? If the text be a command, is it of universal obligation; and must "old men and maidens, young men and children," dance obedience? If a permission, does it imply a permission also to refrain from dancing, if any are disposed? Or, if the text be merely a declaration that there is a time when men do dance, as there is a time when they die, then I might as well be requested to take the first eight verses of the chapter, and show in what consists the evil of those innocent practices of hating, and making war, and killing men, for which, it seems from the text, there is "a time," as well as for dancing.

There is still another difficulty in the text, which just now occurs to me. What *kind* of dancing does the text intend? for it is certainly a matter of no small consequence to "a true Christian," to dance in a scriptural manner, as well as at the scriptural time.

Now, to avoid mistakes on a point of such importance, I have consulted every passage in the Bible which speaks of dancing; the most important of which permit me to submit to your inspection.

"And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her, with timbrels and with dances." Exod. 15:20. This was on account of the overthrow of the Egyptians in the Red sea.

The daughter of Jephthah "came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances." Judges 11:34. This was also on account of a victory over the enemies of Israel.

The yearly feast in Shiloh was a feast unto the Lord, in which the daughters of Shiloh went forth in dances. Judges 21:21. This was done as an act of religious worship.

"And David danced before the Lord with all his might." But the irreligious Michal "came out to meet David, and said, How glorious was the king of Israel to-day, who uncovered himself to-day in the eyes of the handmaids of his servants, as one of the vain fellows shamelessly uncovereth himself!" 2 Sam. 6:14, 20. Dancing, it seems, was a sacred rite and was usually performed by women. At that day, it was perverted from its sacred use by none but "vain fellows," destitute of shame. David vindicates himself from her irony, by saying, "It was before the Lord;" admitting, that had this *not* been the case, her rebuke would have been merited.

On account of the victory of Saul and David over the Philistines, "the women came out of all the cities of Israel singing and dancing." 1 Sam. 18:6.

"Let them praise his name in the dance." Psalm 149:3. "Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing." Psalm 30:11. The deliverance here spoken of was a recovery from sickness, and the dancing an expression of religious gratitude and joy.

"As soon as he came nigh unto the camp, he saw the calf and the dancing." Exod. 32:19. From this it appears that dancing was a part also of idol worship.

"Oh virgin of Israel, thou shalt again be adorned with thy tabrets, and go forth in the dances of them that make merry." Jer. 31:4. This passage predicts the return from captivity, and the restoration of the divine favor, with the consequent expression of religious joy.

"We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented." Matt. 11:17. That is, neither the judgments nor the mercies of God produced any effect upon this incorrigible generation. They neither mourn when called to mourning by his providence, nor rejoice with the usual tokens of religious joy, when his mercies demand their gratitude.

"Now his elder son was in the field; and as he came, and drew nigh unto the house, he heard music and dancing." Luke 15:25. The return of the prodigal was a joyful event, for

which the grateful father, according to the usages of the Jewish church and the exhortation of the Psalmist, "praised the Lord in the dance."

"A time to mourn, and a time to dance." Eccles. 3:4. Since the Jewish church knew nothing of dancing, except as a religious ceremony, or as an expression of gratitude and praise, the text is a declaration that the providence of God sometimes demands mourning, and sometimes gladness and gratitude.

"But when Herod's birthday was kept, the daughter of Herodias danced before them, and pleased Herod." Matt. 14:6. In this case dancing was perverted from its original object, to purposes of vanity and ostentation.

"Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power?" Job 21:7. "They send forth their little ones like a flock, and their children dance. They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down to the grave. Therefore they say unto God, Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. What is the Almighty, that we should serve him: and what profit should we have, if we pray unto him?" Job 21:11, 13-15. Their wealth and dancing are assigned as the reason of their saying unto God, "Depart from us," and of their not desiring the knowledge of his ways, and not delighting to serve him, or pray to him.

From the preceding quotations, it will sufficiently appear,

1. That dancing was a religious act, both of the true and also of idol worship.
2. That it was practised exclusively on joyful occasions, such as national festivals or great victories.
3. That it was performed by maidens only.
4. That it was performed usually in the daytime, in the open air, in highways, fields, or groves.
5. That men who perverted dancing from a sacred use to purposes of amusement, were deemed infamous.
6. That no instances of dancing are found upon record in the Bible, in which the two sexes united in the exercise, either as an act of worship or amusement.
7. That there is no instance upon record of social dancing for amusement, except that of the "vain fellows," devoid of shame; of the irreligious families described by Job, which produced increased impiety, and ended in destruction; and of Herodias, which terminated in the rash vow of Herod, and the murder of John the Baptist.

A TIME TO DANCE.

"A TIME TO DANCE."—ECC. III. 4.

TIME is a term commonly used to indicate the measure of motion, or to signify the duration of anything. This is its primary import. But there is a secondary sense in which it is employed to convey the idea of opportunity, the favourable or fitting occasion for doing anything or forbearing to do it. The use of the term in this secondary sense is not unusual in the inspired writings. As Ecc. viii. 5, "A wise man's heart discerneth both *time* (the proper or favourable occasion for doing or not doing a thing) and judgment." It is by some supposed, that the author of the Book of Ecclesiastes designed the word, as used in these verses, from which my text is taken, to be understood as meaning a fitting occasion. "*To everything there is a season and a time to every purpose under the heaven.*" That is, there is an opportunity, both favourable and suitable, afforded to man in the course of his life, for performing or ceasing to do whatever he may purpose or choose, that comes within the range of his capacities. The language therefore implies the lawfulness and propriety of the several things particularly enumerated: "A time to kill and a time to heal; a time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance." That is, there are occasions in the course of man's history, when it is lawful for him to take life away, and again there are other occasions when it is his duty to

endeavour to preserve it, if imperilled by disease. There are occasions in which it is fit and proper that men should shed tears of mourning, and again there are occasions which call for hilarity, and render it right and becoming for them to dance.

But there is another way of explaining the mode of expression in this passage, which is more in accordance with the evident design of the writer. This explanation confines the word *time* to its more strict meaning and considers it as equivalent to the word *period*. In this view Solomon is understood as merely affirming that certain things actually occur in human history without any reference to the lawfulness or unlawfulness, the fitness or unfitness of these things. There is a time—a period during which men actually do mourn, and then there comes another period in which they are found rejoicing in the dance. He is speaking of the mutability of human affairs, the inconstancy of man's condition. He is painfully affected in contemplating the fact well known and ever newly confirmed by bitter experiences, that the history of man is a history of the most singular vicissitudes. Now he is enjoying life and anon he is at the gate of death. One while he is at the pinnacle of prosperity, the next moment he is tumbled down into the abyss of poverty. To-day the welling tide of grief finds vent only in bitter sobs and scalding tears; to-morrow forgetful of his sorrow he is whirling in the giddy dance amid mirth and laughter. Such is the changeful life of man; and of this fact the Holy Spirit here speaks, as full of instruction to the considerate. But as respects the specific changes instanced, there is nothing here determined as to whether they are proper or improper, right or wrong. So that it is plainly a mere frivolous wresting of the Scriptures which those are guilty of, who allege anything from this place as giving sanction to the indulgence of their hate or their lusts.

I will not, however, at present insist upon the interpretation of this Scripture, just given, as the only correct one. So far as relates to the words selected as a foundation for the present remarks, you may consider them as not only containing the statement of a fact, but also that in this statement there is an implied admission that there is a fitting season for the doing of the thing here mentioned. In other words, I mean to admit not merely that there is a time when men do dance, but that there is a time when they may dance without impropriety.

Having made this admission, it will be necessary to add some further remarks in the way of explanation of the word *to dance*, as it is made use of in the Scriptures. For it would be a great mistake for any one to suppose that it imports that fashionable amusement so much admired and so constantly indulged in by the gay world. So far is this from being the case, that in our text it is not expressive of any kind of amusement at all, but is simply equivalent to the word "rejoice," without having any particular regard to the precise manner in which this rejoicing may find expression. This is manifest, both from the antithesis in which the term is put with the word "to mourn," and also from the paralellism of the two clauses of the verse. In the first clause, laughing is opposed to weeping, and in the last clause mourning to dancing; and the plain, simple idea conveyed by the whole is, that there is a time for sadness and a time for joy. So David says, (Ps. xxx. 11,) "*Thou hast turned for me my MOURNING into DANCING: thou hast put off my SACKCLOTH and girded me with GLADNESS.*" And Jeremiah expresses his own and Israel's melancholy reverses, by saying (Lam. v. 15) "*The joy of my heart is ceased: our DANCE is turned into MOURNING.*"

The words *dance*, *dances*, *danced* and *dancing*, are found in the English version of the Bible twenty-six times. Of these five are in the New Testament, and the rest in the

Old. There are four different Hebrew words which our translators have rendered occasionally by the word *dance*.

The simple idea fundamental to all these words and that which they all convey is that of lively motion either by leaping, jumping, bounding, skipping, whirling round and round, or reeling to and fro. They do not of themselves determine whether these motions are regular according to some studied method, or governed merely by the sudden and irregular impulse of feeling. As to this point all that can, with any certainty be said is, that when used in connection with music, either instrumental or vocal, it is natural to suppose that the motions of the body indicated by them were so regulated as to keep time with the music. And this seems to be the proper signification of the two Greek words in the N. T., which are translated *dance*. The one *ὀρχήσασθε* (Matt. xi. 17; xiv. 6.) meaning any dance to the sound of music; and the other *χορῶν* (Luke xv. 25.) a choral dance, in which a chorus or choir of singers or players upon instruments keep time with the motions of their feet or bodies to the strains of the music. It is in this fact that we discover the reason why the English translators make use of the terms they have, in endeavouring as nearly as possible to convey the exact idea contained in the original. For the verb *to dance*, in our tongue, signifies, "to make certain motions or movements with the feet, corresponding to the sound and tune of music." Yet it is necessary to observe, if we would avoid attaching wrong notions to those places in Scripture where dancing is mentioned, that we must dissociate from the word those ideas which have their origin in the practices of modern times.

It may assist in the right understanding of this matter to bring into one view the several passages in which this exercise is mentioned. The first is in Exod. xv. 20, where we are told that when the children of Israel were engaged in singing the song of triumph over the Egyptian host upon

the shore of the Red Sea, "Miriam, the prophetess, the sister of Aaron took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances." The next instance is recorded in Exod. xxxii. 19, and is a part of the narrative of Israel's idolatrous worship before the golden calf. "*And it came to pass, as soon as he came nigh unto the camp that he saw the calf and the dancing: and Moses' anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands, and brake them beneath the mount.*" In Judges xi. 34, we read that as Jephthah returned from the slaughter of the Ammonites to his house at Mizpeh, "*his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances,*" in honour of the victory her father had obtained over the enemies of Israel. When the strife between the other tribes and little Benjamin had come to an open war, and after a protracted and bloody struggle there remained but a handful of that heroic tribe, in order to prevent its utter extinction, and at the same time to preserve inviolate the oath which had been sworn by the rest of the nation, not to give their daughters in marriage to the men of Benjamin, it was arranged that the children of Benjamin should take advantage of a festival which the daughters of Shiloh celebrated, and lying concealed when they came out to dance in dances, should seize upon them and carry them into their own land as their wives. (Judges xxi. 21, 23.) When David had met and slain the Philistine, Goliath, the giant of Gath, who defied the armies of Israel, as he returned from the field of battle with the victorious host, "the women came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet king Saul, with tabrets, with joy, and with instruments of music." (1 Sam. xviii. 6.) When upon another occasion the Amalekites had made an incursion into the southern part of Judah, and David, guided by an Egyptian servant, who had been left behind by the party, came up with them, he found them "*spread abroad upon all the earth, eating and drinking and*"

dancing, (reeling as drunken men,) because of all the great spoil that they had taken out of the land of the Philistines, and out of the land of Judah." (1 Sam. xxx. 16.) During the religious ceremonies attending the removal of the ark of the covenant from the house of Obed-Edom into the city of David, the king, elated at the propitious event, and filled with pious enthusiasm, "*danced before the Lord with all his might,*" girded with a linen ephod. (2 Sam. vi. 14. 16. 1 Chr. xv. 29.) In the New Testament two instances of dancing are mentioned, one on the occasion of keeping the birth-day of Herod, when "*the daughter of Herodias danced* (*ὡρχήσατο*) before them and pleased Herod." (Matt. xiv. 6.) The other is in the story of the prodigal son, whose return was indicated to his elder brother by the joyous sound of music and *dancing*, (*χορῶν*) which he heard as he drew near to the house. (Luke xv. 25.) In that graphic delineation which is given in the book of Job, of the character and conduct of the prosperous wicked, who say unto God, "*Depart from us for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways,*" we are told that "*they send forth their little ones like a flock, and their children dance.*" (Job xxi. 11.) The Prophet Jeremiah, in depicting the future glory and beauty and joy of the Church, says, "*Again I will build thee, and thou shalt be built, O virgin of Israel: thou shalt again be adorned with thy tabrets, and shalt go forth in the dances of them that make merry.*" * * "Then shall the virgin rejoice in the *dance*, both young men and old together; for I will turn their mourning into joy, and will comfort them, and make them rejoice from their sorrow." (Jer. xxxi. 4, 13.) And twice in the book of Psalms, a command is given and a call made to men to praise God "*in the dance.*" (Ps. cxlix. 3, cl. 4.)

Now in all these instances, with two, or at most three exceptions, it is perfectly evident that the dancing spoken of was not promiscuous between the sexes. The only two

cases in which it might be contended with any plausibility that the dancers consisted of persons of both sexes are, first, that of the profane multitude who tempted God at the foot of Horeb; as it is written "*the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play:*" and, second, that godless crowd who, as they revel in luxury and pleasure, impiously ask, "*What is the Almighty that we should serve him? And what profit should we have if we pray unto him?*" It would not at all surprise me, if one should find evidence, that the dancing of the persons described in these verses, was in some respects closely similar to the promiscuous movements of male and female dancers in the parlours and ball-rooms of modern fashionable society. At all events, however in other respects they may be dissimilar, in this surely they very well agree, that, for the most part, they fear not God, neither regard the operation of his hands. The terrors of the holy and fiery law of God, have not more effect to restrain the lusts of the laughing crowd that in midnight dances pay their devotions to some warrior hero, than had the thunder and flame of Sinai as it smoked and quaked beneath Jehovah's tread, to deter idolatrous Israel from the mad worship of the golden calf.

In the Scriptures, whenever dancing is spoken of with any intimation of its being approved, it is as a religious exercise; not promiscuous, but performed mainly, if not exclusively, by select bands of females; not resembling in any wise the revellings of modern society, except that the motions of the body were regulated, to some extent, by the sound of music. "The character of the ancient dance," says Kitto, "was very different from that of ours, as appears from the conduct of Miriam, who took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances. Precisely similar is the oriental dance of the present day, which, accompanied of course with music, is led by the principal person of the company, the

rest imitating the steps. The evolutions, as well as the songs, are extemporaneous—not confined to a fixed rule, but varied at the pleasure of the leading dancer; and yet they are generally executed with so much grace, and the time so well kept with the simple notes of the music, that the group of attendants show wonderful address and propriety in following the variations of the leader's feet." Amongst the Greeks, such a band of singers and dancers were styled the *χορὸς*—chorus—choir: and it was a company of either hired or voluntary performers (probably servants of the household,) composing such a chorus as is meant, when in the story of the prodigal son it is said, the elder brother as he drew near to the house heard within the sound of "music and dancing."

"At a very early period," says Kitto again, "dancing was enlisted into the service of religion among the heathen; the dance, enlivened by vocal and instrumental music, was a usual accompaniment in all the processions and festivals of the gods (Strabo); and indeed so indispensable was this species of violent merriment, that no ceremonial was considered duly accomplished—no triumph rightly celebrated, without the aid of dancing." "Dancing," says Anthon, "was common among the Romans in ancient times in connection with religious festivals and rites, and was practised, according to Servius, because the ancients thought that no part of the body should be free from the influence of religion." "Dancing, however, was not performed by any Roman citizens, except in connection with religion; and it is only in reference to such dancing that we are to understand the statements that the ancient Romans did not consider dancing disgraceful, and that not only freemen, but the sons of senators and noble matrons practised it. In the later times of the Republic, we know that it was considered highly disgraceful for a freeman to dance.

It is evident, therefore, that anciently, dancing was rank-

ed along with other methods of religious worship, and only so far esteemed becoming the dignity of man, as it could be made subservient to the quickening his pious affections into greater activity, or to the giving fuller play to those affections when highly excited. For such purposes it was made use of by the Jews upon extraordinary occasions; such as the victory over the Philistines, when they rendered praise to God for delivering them from their invaders; or upon the more ordinary occasion of their annual religious and national festivals; or in the temple service. And an exercise of this sort was in perfect harmony with the other splendid and complicated ceremonials of that gorgeous ritual, which was instituted for the preservation and instruction of the church, during the period of her minority, and under an administration which served only as a shadow of good things to come. But since the handwriting of those burdensome ordinances was blotted out by Jesus Christ, when he nailed them to the tree, and a more enlarged administration, as well as a simpler worship has taken place in the church, choral dancing no longer seems appropriate in the sanctuary, nor was it ever made a part of the religious exercises of the primitive Christians. Their feelings of religious joy found utterance in psalms and hymns of praise, chanted to the simplest tunes, agreeably to the direction of the apostle, "*Is any merry? let him sing psalms.*"

If, however, any are not content with adhering to the simplicity of manners and of worship which adorned the profession of the first Christians, but will insist that as our text affirms, so there certainly is "*a time to dance,*" I will not dispute the matter with them further, but will admit it to be so. I will agree that there are times and seasons when men may perhaps do well to praise God in the dance; as did Miriam upon the shores of the Red Sea, or David, when he danced before the ark of God, even at the risk of being despised as one of the "*vain fellows.*"

Let us say then that a time to dance is such as this;

1. When in answer to fervent and importunate prayer, God removes affliction or calamity from a person, a family, a church or a commonwealth. In such a change there is oftentimes produced so great a reaction of feeling in the soul, from deep depression to exuberance of joy, that it is with difficulty the transition can be credited as real. One is ready to take up as his own the song of the pilgrims from Babylon—"When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream; then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing. * * *

The Lord hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad." And the ecstasy of delight which fills the heart of the released mourner finds expression in singing, and shouting, and laughing, and dancing.

2. When upon a soul that has been walking in darkness God lifts up the light of his countenance, and after having for a season withdrawn the sensible evidences of his favour, restores again to him the joys of salvation. Now the reclaimed and revived saint may take down his unstrung harp from the willows, and tuning it anew to the songs of Zion, go forth in the dance of them that rejoice in the Lord, who "gives light in darkness, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garments of praise for the spirit of heaviness."

3. When the devices of those that devise evil counsel against the church are brought to naught, and the enemies of Christ and his people are broken and scattered, and their power for harm destroyed. Let the victory thus granted to his church call forth the highest tribute of praise to Him that sits and rules as King in Zion; let Miriam seize once more her timbrel and lead the dance of the daughters of Israel, whilst they sing to Jehovah who triumphs gloriously over all his foes.

4. When the prodigal, who has wasted his substance in riotous living, thinks upon his ways with penitential sorrow,

and returns from his wandering in the paths of folly and sin, back to his heavenly Father's house; then celebrate the happy event with music and dancing, for it is meet to make merry and be glad when the dead are alive and the lost are found. Yes, such an event claims at our hands unwonted demonstrations of joy, for it is an event that thrills the celestial choir, and strings their harps anew. A soul emancipated from the slavery of sin! a criminal, condemned to die, freely and fully pardoned! a sinner saved! a child of hell made an heir of heaven!—surely a change so strange, so great, may well cause the *“lame man to leap as a hart, and make the tongue of the dumb sing.”* The penitent prodigal, the pardoned sinner, the reconciled believer, if he will, may leap and dance, whilst he sings in chorus with a glad-some church,

“Amazing grace! how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me;
I once was lost, but now am found;
Was blind, but now I see.”

If these be the occasions when it is fitting that men should praise God in the dance, then may I not safely decide when it is *not* a time to dance? Surely it is not a time to dance when the judgments of God are abroad in the earth—when the hearts of men are failing them because of those things that are coming upon the world—when the ways of Zion mourn because few come to her solemn feasts—when the quickening power of the Holy Spirit is withdrawn from the church—when men are hastening in mad and careless crowds to the judgment bar of heaven without Christ, and having no hope in the world. Shall a nation to whom God is speaking in wrath, as he scatters upon it the burning coals of pestilence, or hurls against it the thunder-bolts of war—shall such a nation dance? Shall men condemned to eternal death, with the burning pit of hell before them, and avenging Justice swift pursuing them

—shall such men make merry? Ah, no! The voice of reason, of conscience, of Scripture, of God's Spirit, all—all call such to mourning instead of dancing—to sackcloth instead of feasting.

These, however, are not the only results at which we arrive from a careful and candid examination of the Bible teachings upon the subject under discussion. There are other and not less important conclusions to which these teachings inevitably lead us, respecting that dancing which is practised to so large an extent in every circle of society; from the imported Italian or French danseuse, the admired star of the Opera or the Theatre, who, Salome like, turns at once the heads of Princes and of fops, down through the whole range of ball-room revellers, holiday soldiers, pleasure loving philanthropists, elegant and accomplished beaux and belles in respectable christian parlours, until we reach the wild midnight wake of the miserable Irish hovel, or the bacchanalian orgies of the public stew. And what are these conclusions? I answer,

FIRST.—that no countenance is afforded by the word of God to the practice of this fashionable amusement. It is more unlike that religious exercise which is spoken of in the Scriptures, heretofore explained, as sacred to the worship of God, than are the psalms of David, or the Song of songs, to the odes of Anacreon or of Horace. It has its counterpart not in the graceful though unstudied movements of the sister of Moses, prompted by the impulse of pious emotion, but in the voluptuous pantomime of the daughter of Herodias impelled by vanity and leading to crime. It is a corrupt and corrupting practice, derived to modern society from the public games and private amusements of the Greeks and Romans, at which slaves and courtesans entertained the spectators and guests with an exhibition of their persons and their skill, in dances scarcely less indecent than the *pas de deux* of a common theatrical performance, or the immodest

waltz of a social parlour party of five hundred particular friends. Without the least hesitation it may be affirmed, that this fashionable amusement, as taught by French *Monsieurs* and *Mesdames*, whether to children or grown up boys and girls, and as indulged in by a thoughtless world, at *soirees*, at fairs, at weddings, or at balls, belongs to the forbidden category of "chambering and wantonness," which the Spirit of God has associated with "rioting and drunkenness."

SECOND,—this amusement can never with propriety be participated in by Christians. This proposition would appear to be so necessary a corollary from what has already been said, as to require no further proof. Is this amusement but the remnant of the licentious customs of heathenism, an exercise which it was reserved for slaves and courtesans alone to cultivate? is it so utterly devoid of countenance from the holy word of God, and does it necessarily imply the making of provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof? then surely one might suppose that no Christian could regard it as a thing in which he could innocently participate. But nevertheless there are Christians who can see no harm, they say, in mere dancing; who think people must have some such recreation; who go into ecstasies of delight at the charming sight of the little ones whom God has given them to be trained for heaven, whirling amid the fascinating mazes of the *petit bal*—Christians, who are oftener seen at the dancing party, than at the prayer meeting; and who, though they cannot stand upright during a ten minutes prayer in the house of God, can keep upon their feet to the sound of the piano or fiddle until the dawning of the morning—Christians, who never could understand why the ministers of the gospel should be so uncompromising toward the world, and not make piety more attractive by showing that it is not incompatible with pleasure. For the sake of this class of professing Christians, as well as to disabuse the

gospel we preach, from the charge of being opposed to real enjoyment, it is proper to assign some special additional reasons in support of the opinion we entertain as announced in the proposition, that a Christian cannot with propriety participate in the fashionable amusement of dancing.

1st. It is beyond all contradiction, and by way of eminence, known to be a worldly amusement. It belongs to the men and women of this world by long prescriptive right. It cannot be placed alongside of those things which all men have in common with each other, and the doing or not doing of which in no wise marks a Christian as distinguished from another man. This amusement may not be classed with conversation or reading, with walking, jumping, riding, hunting, and some less athletic recreations. It does not stand on a footing with some children's plays, which enliven the domestic fire-side. It belongs to the same class of dissipating recreations as horse-racing, card-playing and theatrical exhibitions. I know there are professing Christians who esteem these last named amusements as harmless, and whose consciences are no hindrance to their occupying a box at the theatre, or taking a hand at whist. But how little difference the man of the world recognizes between himself and such professors, we know but too well. What remains to show that the Christian has renounced the vanities of the world, and been crucified to its follies, when the hand of a godless partner has been accepted for the next reel or polka? Alas! she who has been whirling round the ball-room for half the night clasped by the hands of some flattering debauchee, needs, methinks, to spend many days of fasting and penitential sorrow, before she comes again to handle and taste of the body and blood of the crucified Jesus. The sad experiences of not a few wanderers, who still remember with shame and tears the steps of their backslidings, more than sufficiently attest the correctness of what I have said.

2ND. Those who engage in this amusement with most avidity, and advocate it with greatest zeal, do not propose to praise or worship God in it. It may safely be affirmed that the vast majority of such persons, so far from esteeming the honour of God in what they do, curse him in their hearts. The God that made them, and before whom they must shortly appear to give an account of the deeds done in the body, is not in all their thoughts. They love the dance all the more because it helps them to forget him, and they can so easily drown all serious thoughts of "a judgment to come" in the intoxication of pleasure. And the sight of those whom they know to be professed followers of Christ mingling in the giddy throng with themselves, only serves to render the task an easier one. This is a fact attested by too many sad examples to be disputed. No one ever went to a dancing party with the expectation of having his religious affections quickened into new life. Did any one ever return from the excitement of such a party without feeling that those affections were chilled? But supposing that here and there one may be found who, in the midst of such scenes, is unseduced, the vigour of his piety remaining unimpaired, these form only the exception; the usual effect remains the same. Thoughts of eternity suit not the unbridled gaiety of the cotillion party; and men who are considered exemplary for godly living are not often named as floor managers upon such occasions. The duties of that post suit much better those who "have cast off fear and restrain prayer before God;" who sneer at the rigidity of puritanic piety, and think apostolic Christianity "a religion unfit for a gentleman."

3RD. This amusement, as practised, is highly injurious to health. I mention this because not a few are beguiled into sending their children to dancing schools, through the influence of those who represent it as a healthful recreation. Now this plea might have in it some force, if this exercise

was performed in the open air, and in the ordinary dress of every day life. But how far otherwise it is, every body very well knows. The thin dress, the tightly laced corsets, the heated room, the oppressive atmosphere, the unnatural hours, all tell of disease and death, instead of health-bringing relaxation. Surely it is not rosy-checked health that keeps the entrance to those places where youth and beauty assemble, to spend the wakeful hours of night in dissipation; no, it is CONSUMPTION with gaunt and pallid form, that stands sentinel there, breathing his icy, poisonous breath upon the face of the laughing crowd.*

I remember to have heard a gentleman of some literary fame, in a lecture, not long since, very wittily indeed, describe those who objected to dancing as an amusement, as "a long-faced and sour-visaged" set of fellows. The stroke of humour was given apparently with great satisfaction to the artist, and was received with no small merriment by the audience. Now, without disputing the correctness of the picture, or stopping to suggest that it is not unlikely many of the persons thus flippantly disposed of would readily challenge a comparison with the most rotund visaged, giggling dancer, in the matter of substantial enjoyment of the

* "As a hygienic method it is obnoxious to several strictures. *First:* It partakes too largely of the character of an amusement to admit of sufficient muscular exertion, without generating a love of pleasure; which, once established, will render all exercise, not productive of immediate enjoyment, tasteless and irksome. Thus, this kind of exercise may be said to be self-limited. *Second:* Children and young persons, when prepared for dancing school or dancing parties, are generally dressed in a way that is unfavourable to the free action of their limbs; and, what is of far greater moment, of the muscles of respiration. *Third:* They are crowded into an apartment where the air is heated and impure; and often too, at night, during the very hours when they ought, according to their physiology, to be asleep. *Fourth:* Some, who have frail and delicate nervous systems, are injured by the music so long acting upon them. *Fifth:* They are all liable to be injured by the eating and drinking which too often prevail. Dancing, in fact, is much more a means of disciplining the muscles, than of giving them vigour. As a method of exercise in childhood and youth, it is insufficient; and as a method of amusement, in after years, it is neglected by those, who, physiologically speaking, most require it."—*Drake's Diseases of the Valley of North America.* Vol. I. pp. 698, 699.

sweets of domestic and social life, it may admit of a fair question, whether, in so far as respects every thing essential to man's true dignity and high destiny, a "long face" is not more becoming than a bloated one, and a sad or sour visage than one which dissipation has rendered haggard, pale, effeminate or sottish. Give me the tearful eye of the praying saint, before the bloodshot, languid look of the devotee of lust. If my face must be marked with premature furrows, and my vigour exhausted by midnight watchings, let my vigils be like those of the Man of sorrows, and not such as are kept by the worshippers at fashion's meretricious shrine.

4TH. The promiscuous dance is incompatible with modesty. This remark may be applied to the children's dance in the parlour, and to the dancing of grown up men and women in other places, according to the measure of each. The evil indeed, begins in the dancing school, which, instead of being called a school of easy manners, ought rather to be styled a place where girls are taught to substitute the finesse of the coquette for true female delicacy, and boys take their primary lessons in the art of seduction.

But suppose we yield you these two points, and except in your favour the dancing school, and the social parlour quadrille, would you be satisfied? Will you stop here? Can you assure us or yourselves that your children will be content with this amount of indulgence? Have you spent so much money in having them taught this very desirable accomplishment, and now shall they not have liberty to show how attentive they have been to their culture, and what proficiency they have made? Shall the little boys and girls dance, and not the young men and maidens, the old men and matrons? No one can sincerely expect a condition of things like this. Why then do so many people plead for

* This experiment has more than once been tried; with what sort of success let the sad regrets of over-indulgent parents and pastors bear witness.

the innocence of having children taught this accomplishment, and permitting well-regulated dances at weddings and tea-parties, yet pretend a pious disapprobation of ball-room and theatre dancing? Is not dancing the same thing in effect every where? Are not the same steps, the same bodily movements, the same dances taught in the school that are practised on the stage? Why then should Mary, grown to woman's years, be blamed for practising what the child, Mary, was taught to love and call an elegant accomplishment?

The truth is, if the dancing you condemn is immodest and improper, that which you approve is so too. And it is in this view of the matter that it has long been agreed by eminent christian men, that an indulgence in this amusement is inconsistent with that purity which is required by the seventh commandment. Hence in the Larger Catechism of the Westminster Assembly, under the list of particular sins forbidden by that commandment, "*lascivious dancings*" are included. How justly entitled to this denomination are the most fashionable dances of the present day, I submit to the candid judgment of every Christian who knows any thing on the subject. I do not say that no one can be chaste or modest who dances. But that there is an incompatibility, an incongruity between that delicate modesty which ought ever to characterize the intercourse of the sexes, and the promiscuous dances now so almost universal, I unhesitatingly affirm. Whether it be that most lascivious of all exhibitions, the ballet dancing of a French Opera, or the vile round of polkas and waltzes* performed by young and old

* THE WALTZ.—"As many of the retired matrons of this city, unskilled in 'gestic lore,' are doubtless ignorant of the movements and figures of this modest exhibition, I will endeavour to give some account of it in order that they may learn what odd capers their daughters sometimes cut, when from under their guardian wings. On a signal being given by the music, the gentleman seizes the lady round her waist; the lady scorning to be outdone in courtesy, very politely takes the gentleman round the neck, with one arm resting against his shoulder to prevent encroach-

at parties and weddings, makes small odds. All must be alike hurtful to true purity of heart; all ought to be abhorred by him that would follow the command of Paul to "flee youthful lusts," and by her that would heed the charge of the Apostle to Christian women "to adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety."

5TH. Indulgence in this amusement is inconsistent with that Christian sobriety, vigilance, and prayerfulness, to which we are called by our circumstances, in the midst of a world that lies in wickedness, and in view of the near approach of death and judgment. "Watch and pray," said Christ to his disciples, "lest ye enter into temptation." "Watch, therefore, for ye know not the day nor the hour when the Son of man cometh." "Let us," says Paul, "who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breast-plate of faith and love; and for an helmet the hope of salvation." "Be sober, be vigilant;" says Peter, "because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." And again, "The end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober and watch unto prayer."

ments. Away then they go, about, and about, and about—"About what, sir?" About the room, madam, to be sure. The whole economy of this dance consists in turning round and round the room in a certain measured step, and it is truly astonishing that this continued revolution does not set all their heads swimming like a top; but I have been positively assured that it only occasions a gentle sensation, which is marvellously agreeable. In the course of this circumnavigation, the dancers, in order to give the charm of variety are continually changing their relative situations—now the gentleman, meaning no harm in the world, I assure you, madam, carelessly flings his arm about the lady's neck, with an air of celestial impudence; and anon, the lady meaning as little harm as the gentleman, takes him round the waist with most ingenious, modest languishment, to the great delight of numerous spectators and amateurs, who generally form a ring, as the mob do about a pair of Amazons pulling caps, or a couple of fighting mastiffs. After continuing this divine interchange of hands, arms, et cetera, for half an hour or so, the lady begins to tire, and 'with eyes upraised,' in most bewitching languor, petitions her partner for a little more support. This is always given without hesitation. The lady leans gently on his shoulder; their arms entwine in a thousand seducing, mischievous curves—don't be alarmed, madam—closer and closer they approach each other, and in conclusion, the parties being overcome with ecstatic fatigue, the lady seems almost sinking into the gentleman's arms, and then—"Well, sir! what then?" (Why) madam, how should I know?"—WASHINGTON IRVING.

With such admonitions and warnings sounding in their ears, how can Christians plunge headlong into the dissipations of an unfriendly world? Men are continually undone by things that are beyond all doubt lawful and even necessary. Why then increase the perils of immortal souls, by giving sanction to things, in themselves, at least of questionable propriety? Intoxicating pleasures, possessing a power of fascination, by far the fewest number have strength to resist. Oh, Christians, if you have any compassion for dying souls, for their sakes "be not conformed to this world."

6TH. If professing christians are seen engaging in the giddy dance, unconverted men will take occasion, from their conduct, to scoff at the religion they profess, and to condemn the name of Christ. It is only to practise a delusion upon oneself for any to indulge the thought that it can be otherwise. I cannot well imagine a more speedy method of teaching a careless young man to despise the Christian name, than for some female acquaintance, whom he has seen at the communion table, to become his partner in the dance. Nor is anything probably more usual in such a case, than for those who look on, quietly to pass the ungracious whisper, "See that pious dancer—why she waltzes as if she had been accustomed to it—she seems to love it as much as any of us poor sinners—a pretty Christian to be sure." This is no fancy sketch, they know little of the world who suppose it to be so; for that which Cicero did not hesitate to call "a vice that no one would be guilty of till he had utterly abandoned all virtue; and that which follows riot and debauchery, as the shadow follows the body,"*

* "Cato styles L. Murena a dancer. If this be truly alleged it is the reproach of a fierce accuser; if falsely, it is the slander of a reviler. Since then in this you may have influence, you ought not, M. Cato, to catch up a slander from the street or from some convivial assembly of scoffers, nor lightly call a Consul of the Roman people a dancer; but consider with what other vices he must be corrupted against whom this could be charged with truth. For almost no one ever dances who is sober, unless he be a madman; neither in solitude, nor at temperate and decent enter,

I take it, is now, in the middle of the nineteenth century, well understood by unconverted men, not to consist with what ought reasonably to be looked for in genuine Christian character.*

For reasons like these, of the soundness of which time and observation have more fully satisfied my mind, I still entertain the opinion several years ago publicly expressed, that dancing cannot with propriety be participated in by Christians. And by Christians, whilst I mean especially those who have been admitted to the Lord's supper, I do not mean them exclusively. I wish to be understood as comprehending under the name all the baptized. And it seems necessary to state this particularly, in order to correct a not uncommon mistake. Many think that if they have never come to the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, they are not members of the church, and it is not inconsistent for them to live and act as the ungodly world. And so I have heard a Christian parent urge that it was not improper for her children to go to the dancing school, though she considered it inconsistent for a communicant to dance. But are not all baptized children members of the church?

tainments. Of a seasonable banquet, of an agreeable place, of many pleasant recreations, dancing is the last (or basest) accompaniment. You impute to me that which is necessarily the lowest of vices, and yet you pass over those things which being discarded this vice surely could not exist. No shameful banquet, no wanton love, no revel, no debauch, no prodigality is shown; and since none of those things are proved that have the name of pleasure, and which are vicious, do you think to find that which attends only upon sensual excess in him, in whom you cannot find even excess itself?"—Cicero *Orat. pro L. Murena*, vi. 13.

* It is true, indeed, that the sneers of the world are no more to regulate the conduct of the Christian, than its smiles. It may object against him for too rigid abstinence, as they did against John the Baptist; or he may be reproached for indulgence as was Jesus Christ. The truly wise will justify those who show a wholesome discretion in a seasonable doing or not doing of things lawful. But yet we are not at liberty to disregard the report of "them that are without." Christians are to avoid the appearance of evil, and not to be conformed to this world. It is necessary, therefore, to listen to what the world thinks and says about certain practices, in order to form a right judgment as to whether indulgence in them is forbidden by these precepts.

and are not members of the church bound to live as Christians? If so, where the propriety in Christian parents sending their children to learn that which, as Christians, it would be unbecoming in them to practise, and which they must unlearn and renounce as a preparatory step towards being admitted into the full communion of God's people? The whole thing is sufficiently plain; "the wayfaring man though a fool, need not err" in regard to it. If it is incompatible with Christian character for a communicant to dance, it is scarcely less so for the baptized to dance; and therefore the parent, who has presented his child to receive this seal of the covenant and sign of his engrafting into Christ, is unfaithful to his vows and does a wrong to his child, if he trains him in the practice of that which is unsuitable to a true disciple of Christ.

And now, in conclusion of this discussion, I say to those who plead for this vain and hurtful amusement, and who indulge in the practice of it, never appeal to the Bible as sanctioning it. Be candid enough to others and honest enough toward yourselves, to acknowledge that there is no word of God that countenances your sinful pleasures. When you cross the threshold of the ball-room, remember that you cannot take with you the protection of God's promises, for you will have gone out of the path prescribed in his precepts. If an upbraiding conscience disquiets your heart, amidst the hilarity around you, and you would fain take shelter from its chidings, under the cover of the words, there is "a time to dance," remember that such a perverted use of Scripture will only prove a refuge of lies. Forget not also to recall these other words here written, "a time to mourn," and "a time to die." Yes, take this thought with you to the ball-room and dancing-party, *There is a time to die!* When, where, how, no one can tell. Perchance Death may become your partner in the dance, and your ball dress be your shroud. Such things have been. There have

been gay youth who have danced away their precious lives, and their immortal souls have sped into the presence of God while as yet the sound of the viol had scarce died on their ears. Ah! there is a time to die, and God has set that time. You need not dance, you must die. You can excuse yourself from the scene of mirthful revelry, but not from the bed of death. You can easily stay away from the ball-room, when your companions invite, but not from the chamber of death, when called by the voice of God. And if that call should find you unprepared, alas! how sad the change! How truly must your dancing be turned into mourning. But if you love the world—the things of the world—the vain, fleeting, deceitful pleasures of the world, surely, you cannot flatter yourself with the thought that you are prepared to die! Prepared to die.

“Preposterous fool * * *

Think'st thou that mirth and vain delights,
High feed, and shadow-short'ning nights,
Soft knees, full bags, and beds of down,
Are proper prologues to a crown?
Or canst thou hope to come and view,
Like prosperous Cæsar, and subdue?
* * * Ah! fool, beware,
The safest road's not always even;
The way to Hell's a seeming Heaven.”

The round of gaiety and pleasure you and thousands of others are pursuing, leaves little time for preparation to die. To talk of the last party, to recover from the lassitude and ennui it has produced, and to get ready for the next, leave no place nor disposition for serious thought or earnest inquiry into the soul's state. Balls and routs suit ill with prayer. And without prayer can any think to be prepared for death and judgment?

“That day, that day, whose all-discerning light

Ransacks the secret dens of night,

And severs good from bad; true joys from false delight.

How will your eyes endure this day?

Hills will be deaf, and mountains will not hear;

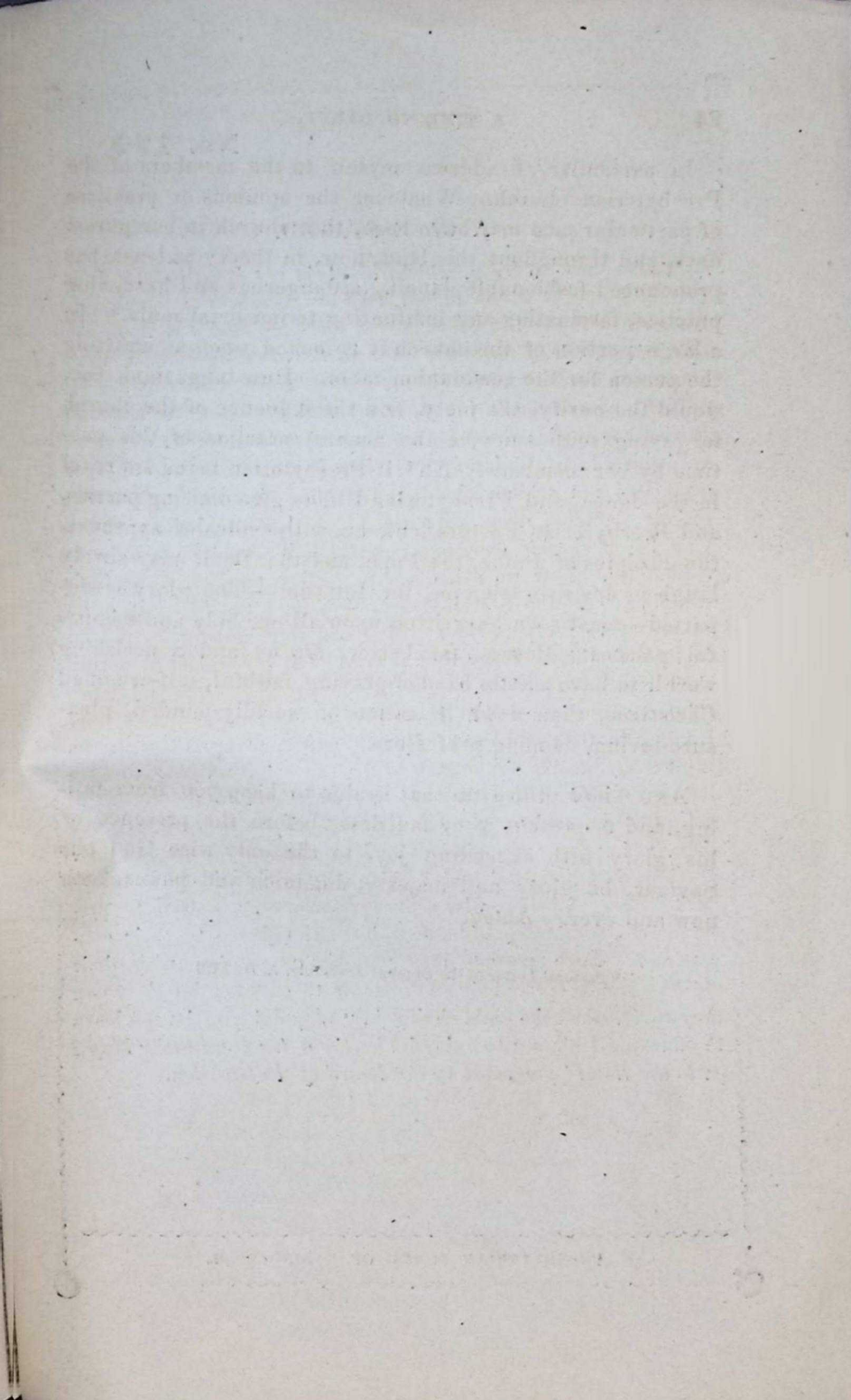
There be no caves, nor corners there,

To shade your souls from fire, to shield your hearts from fear.”

In particular, I address myself to the members of the Presbyterian church. Whatever the opinions or practices of particular men may have been, that church in her purest days, and throughout this land, now, in theory at least, has pronounced fashionable dancing a dangerous and hardening practice, fascinating and infatuating to immortal souls.* In a large portion of the church it is looked upon as unfitting the person for the communion table. How long, think you, would the purity, the piety, and the influence of the church for saving souls, survive the general practice of this pastime by her members? Ah! if Presbyterian members revel in the dance, and Presbyterian Elders give dancing parties, and Presbyterian Pastors look on with smiles of approval, the disciples of Paine, the Pope, and the Devil may surely laugh in derisive triumph, for ICHABOD—The glory is departed—must soon be written upon all our holy and beautiful palaces. Better, far better, for us and a perishing world, to have a little band of praying, faithful, self-crucified Christians, than a whole nation of worldly-minded, pleasure-loving, dancing professors.

AND “now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you, faultless, before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.”

* Pastoral Letter of the General Assembly, A. D., 1818



A CASE STATED.

We suppose a case, which, alas! is not imaginary. It is that of a family whose united head are members of the church. They contend for the innocence of dancing, and act upon the opinion. Their children are sent to the dancing-school; their hearts are fascinated with the amusement; they naturally ask for opportunities of displaying their art and gratifying their tastes; parties are made; dress becomes an absorbing topic; expenses are incurred, health is exposed; late hours are kept; improper associates not seldom chosen; the mind thoroughly diverted; serious thoughts dismissed; the physical frame jaded; and a long list of similar consequences which it would be tedious to enumerate. Now we ask these professing parents, if by their compliance in the first instance, they have not found it often necessary to postpone the morning and evening worship of God in their families. Have they not found it convenient to curtail their religious charities, to meet the expenses of dress and entertainment thus incurred? Have they not encouraged vanity and frivolity in their children? Have they not placed them in the most unfavourable circumstances for relishing and practising religious duties? Have they not exposed them to the ingress of evil passions, such as envy and pride? Have they not exposed them to improper associations? Have they not jeopardized their precious and immortal souls? Can they send their children into such scenes, and then, with a pure conscience, ask God to preserve them from temptation, or to bless the dance to their conversion? Such parents may possibly expostulate with their children not to carry their amusements to excess; but how can they reply, when the child shall ask, "Why did you let me learn to dance, if I am not to enjoy it?"—See a tract entitled "*May I go to the Ball?*" published by the Board of Publication.